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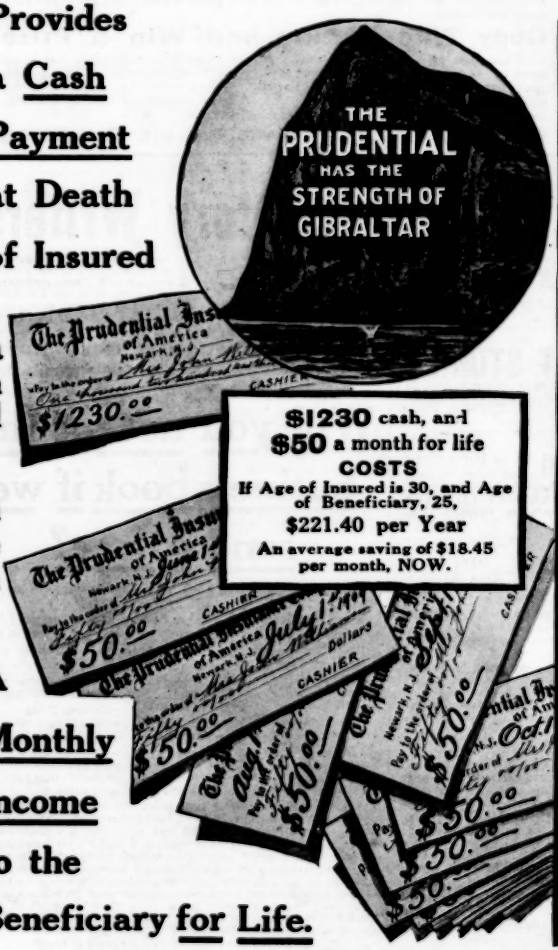

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The Friend of the Fool.*

BY HELEN ELLSWORTH WRIGHT.

GORDON MORSE tramped home, his portfolio bulging with specimens. The "Court Fool," a brindled, bow-legged, undershot bull-dog, trotted excitedly ahead with his face to the trail. At the cabin, he gave a disgruntled "Yap."

"Hello!" the man cried, observing in astonishment that his usually open door was closed; then he stood still. Above it, on an improvised signboard, were the words "Mary's Inn." A note, too, was pinned to the casing.

"Mary's not in," it read, "but she might have been, even yet, if you'd stayed at home to receive her, you contrary old batch."

Gordon stared in amazement. "Well, it's quite as well for 'Mary' that she's not," he retorted.

In the cabin, tall, tasseled branches of his cherished mountain currant nodded at him from the fireplace; they greeted him from the book-shelves. An oil-can had been swathed in brown paper. It stood in the middle of his work table, topped by a shower bouquet. A blot had blurred his manuscript. The kitchen was

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in order; he had left his breakfast dishes with those from his supper, while he finished an article on the "Umbelliferæ." The floor had been swept. A savoryness pervaded the room. The Court Fool was greedily sniffing at the table.

"Biscuits!" Gordon ejaculated, his eyes widening. "Gingerbread! Who in all —" He spied a paper under the plate. On it was scribbled:

"Mary had a cousin, dear,
She loved him well, you know,
So when he to the mountains went,
Why, Mary had to go.

"Her mother came for chaperon,
(She didn't mind a bit!)
Now, hunt, perhaps you'll find them;
It's hide and seek; you're 'It.'"

"By all the Horns of the Altar!" Gordon exploded. "I never had a cousin Mary! I don't want one!"

He went cautiously through the cabin, half unconsciously peering under things,— behind things. He eyed the gingerbread as if it held dynamite. It was good to the look and alluringly odorous; at last —. There was little but crumbs when he turned to his specimens. He changed the drying-pads; then he left them unweighted and went out to stare at the signboard.

The next day he laid a trap. He tidied the rooms, left the door invitingly ajar, and retired in ambush, to the kitchen. From the window he could see the trail. He told himself that she would return, this 'Mary'; she would be the species of girl he detested. He thought of a line from Proverbs with which to greet her, "The highway of the upright is to depart." No doubt, she was a very young person; from the pinnacle of his thirty years, he would show her, in a kind, middle-aged fashion, the error of her ways. He waited four days before he decided that she was not coming back.

The morning after that, he overslept, and awoke to stretch luxuriantly and stare through the open door. A choir of birds were singing. His mountain, shagged with oak and laurel and madrone, was quilted with early sunshine. With half shut eyes, he followed the path to his cabin, curving, dipping, climbing —

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. Around the nearest bend, loped a white pony, and on its back was a girl.

The room offered no shelter. Gordon bounded to the kitchen, to the woodhouse. He watched through a crack in its door.

The girl whistled a quail-call. She was not what he had pictured. He had an inward prompting to get her away from there, quick. He wondered if it would answer if he shouted "Bears!" Then, he heard the jingle of the Court Fool's bells; it was like the assurance of rescue.

"That bull-dog doesn't bite," he gleefully whispered, "but you don't happen to know it! If you don't — RUN —"

She stooped with a childish cry of delight. "Oh, you beautifully ugly thing," she coaxed. "We thought you were a collie!"

The dog was whining, barking, giving joyous licks at her hand. She caught him to read the inscription on his collar: "Dagonet, Court Fool."

"If that isn't like him," she laughed. "Why, he wrote me your name was 'Dan.'"

Gordon groaned. He pulled the door closer shut, planning impossible escapes,— possible meetings.

A moment afterwards, he heard her in the cabin. She was — yes, she was undoubtedly putting it in order. Presently, dishes rattled . . . He sniffed the aroma of coffee. The minutes were hours in the woodhouse. It seemed at least a week later that she came to the cabin door to scan the timber with wide, deep-blue eyes. She personified, he owned, a word of four letters, H-O-M-E. Her blue linen sleeves were rolled up,— a dab of flour set off one glowing cheek. Again, she whistled the quail-call. The dog gazed up adoringly. She knelt and took his cockled head between brown, capable hands,— shapely, beautiful hands, Gordon acknowledged.

"Dagonet," she nodded, "we're ready to fry the bacon! Go find him! *Go find your master!* Go on!"

Obediently, the Court Fool whirled, scented, and made for the woodhouse, scratching madly at its door. His bark was apologetic, glad, — a bark that cried, — "There are three of us! I'd forgotten!"

The girl who followed him did not understand. She looked

Gordon full in the face before the door slammed and he heard the slip of the bolt. Her step was uncertain, as if from fright, as she went towards the cabin.

Five minutes passed — ten. He was sure she had fainted. This was a pretty mess, he told himself. He wished she was in Jericho! Probably she was lying in a limp little heap on his floor. Well, he'd have to do something. He put his shoulder against the door. It was then, through a crack, he saw her coming. She carried his gun. She came straight to the wood-house and sat down on a rock outside, an erect, determined sentinel.

Through the crack, he studied her profile. Her nose was tip-tilted; her hair rippled. Her mouth was firm, but a dimple lurked near its corner. Her round, pink chin turned up; that had its dimple too. After a moment, he decided to speak to her — to tell her that he was Gordon Morse, the botanist, collecting for the Academy. He only cleared his throat a time or two and asked meekly:

"What are you going to do?"

"Keep you till my cousin comes," she answered, without turning. "If you try to come out, I shall shoot!"

He laughed; the girl and the gun were incongruous. "If you try to come in —" he menaced.

"You needn't be afraid," she retorted. "I know convict's stripes when I see them!"

He glanced at his dress and sobered. "W-hy," he stammered, "it does look like that! They're my — Thunder! I guess I'll have to tell you."

"Don't!" she cried. "I don't care what you did! . . . You didn't — kill any one?"

"Well, hardly! I'm Gordon —"

"I never read who's escaped!" She drew a freer breath and relaxed her grip on the gun. After a while, she ventured, "Did you steal?"

"N-o," he answered, absorbed by the lights in her hair. It was very pretty hair — exactly the kind for a "Mary." If he had on his tramping suit — he meditated, pleasantly, that he looked rather well in that. If they two were on the rock behind

the big spring, where the giant woodwordias grow — "Good Heavens!" he blurted. "I wish you'd unbolt this door and go home."

She did not seem to hear. "I'm glad it wasn't for stealing," she mused. "I suppose you did something a great deal worse, but it takes such a mean man to steal!"

There were wonderful dapples on her cheek. A tendril of that ripply hair beckoned, and coaxed and — dared. Gordon grew suddenly lonely.

"There's no one to care," he sighed, "if I were steeped neck deep in disgrace."

She turned, half towards him, yet it sounded as if she were talking to herself. "Most of the dreadful things in the world," she philosophized, "are done because people think 'nobody cares.' Somebody does, every time."

"Hum-m," he considered. "Who, for instance?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she answered, stiffly. "Most likely, your mother."

"She died when I was twelve years old."

"Your sister, or — wife?"

"Never had 'em. Go on."

"Well," a little recklessly, "whoever took care of you and brought you up."

"That's nobody. Next?"

There was silence, set into clauses, this time from the girl. The sun blazed down; she began to look wilted.

"Aren't you ever going home?" Gordon demanded. "You haven't had any breakfast."

"I'm dreadfully hungry," she admitted, after a pause.

"So am I," he cried, joyfully, as if he had discovered a choice coincidence.

She laid down the gun; she seemed thinking. The dimple came into play. Presently, she commanded —

"Repeat this after me: I promise . . . on my honor . . . not to force the door . . . if you pass in something to eat."

Gordon obeyed.

When she came back, she slipped a tray to him and refastened the bolt. The tray held bacon, crumpy biscuits, and coffee.

"But yours," he begged. "Please bring it out to the rock. You know I might — escape."

They did not eat much in spite of the fact that they were hungry. She stared at the blue line of hills; he stared, through the crack, at her. Afterwards, he could not remember how it all began. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to tell her of the forlorn little boy who had been himself,— of the lad who had everything to overcome. He had commenced to tell her of the present man, when she sprang up and fled to the cabin.

She returned to deposit a bundle. The next time she came she led the white pony. There was an odd little choke in her voice.

"I've brought you some of my cousin's clothes," she whispered. "You did'nt steal; I gave them. I'm going to pay it all back. I've brought you four dollars and sixty cents. It was all I could find. Good gracious! Do go before my cousin comes home!"

She unfastened the bolt.

"Comes home?" Gordon echoed. "Comes — HOME?"

The pony was loping down the trail and Dagonet whined at the door.

The next two days Gordon Morse, botanist, searched the country for something which his heart named, "Mary-gold." There was no clue. On the third, a creamy envelope waited in his mail-box, addressed, in his care, to the Court Fool. The note within read:

"DAGONET:

"I haven't the sense of a polywog! I'm ready to die of shame! My cousin, George Warren, lives on the other spur of the mountain. Mother and I came up to surprise him. We stopped at the Ridgeby's; then mother was ill, and I — ?

"Please tell all this to the Wise Man and ask him, if he can, to forgive,

"MARY EMMERSON, the Friend of the Fool."

The next afternoon found Gordon on a rock above the Ridgeby ranch. A primrose offered its dew-cup, but the author of "Fourteen Weeks with Flowers," did not see it. When his courage had germinated, he went to the house.

Miss Emmerson and her mother had gone with the cousin the day before.

Gordon climbed the other spur of the mountain. Miss Emmer-

son was out. He went five times before he took the Court Fool into council.

"Dagonet," he began, "we've just a week, here, left, and that ravine separates us from — HER. We need her."

He wrote a note and fastened it to the dog's collar.

"DEAR LADY OF MARY'S INN:

"The Court Fool has come to tell you that my work here is finished. The 'contrary old batch' must go back to town. I've taken down the sign-board; wherever my home is, that shall be its name. I've a great deal more to tell you. Please may I not come over and find that Mary's in?

"GORDON MORSE."

That night, he climbed the other spur with Dagonet tugging at an unfamiliar leash. He made his way to the cabin; he fastened the leash to the doorknob.

In the morning, Dagonet returned. He leered knowingly at his master; there was no answering message on his collar.

For three endless days, Gordon waited. On the fourth, another note was in his box, for the Fool. It only said:

"Tell him 'yes.'"

The Quicksand Terror.*

BY FRANK H. SWEET.

CALLIOPE CATESBY was in his humors again. Ennui was upon him. This goodly promontory, the earth — particularly that portion of it known as Quicksand — was to him no more than a pestilent congregation of vapors. Overtaken by the megrims, the philosopher may seek relief in soliloquy; my lady find solace in tears; the flaccid Easterner scold at the millinery bills of his women folks. Such recourse was insufficient to the denizens of Quicksand. Calliope, especially, was wont to express his ennui according to his lights.

Over night Calliope had hung out signals of approaching low spirits. He had kicked his own dog on the porch of the Occidental Hotel, and refused to apologize. He had become capricious and fault-finding in conversation. While strolling about he reached often for twigs of mesquite and chewed the leaves fiercely. That was always an ominous act. Another symptom, alarming to those who were familiar with the different stages of his doldrums, was his increasing politeness and a tendency to use formal phrases. A husky softness succeeded the usual penetrating drawl in his tones. A dangerous courtesy marked his manners. Later, his smile became crooked, the left side of his mouth slanting upward, and Quicksand got ready to stand from under.

At this stage Calliope generally began to drink. Finally, about midnight, he was seen going homeward, saluting those whom he met with exaggerated but inoffensive courtesy. Not yet was Calliope's melancholy at the danger point. He would seat himself at the window of the room he occupied over Silvester's tonsorial parlors, and there chant lugubrious and tuneless ballads until morning, accompanying the noises by appropriate maltreatment of

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a jingling guitar. More magnanimous than Nero, he would thus give musical warning of the forthcoming municipal unheaval that Quicksand was scheduled to endure.

A quiet, amiable man was Calliope Catesby at other times — quiet to indolence, and amiable to worthlessness. At best he was a loafer and a nuisance, — at worst he was the Terror of Quicksand. His ostensible occupation was something subordinate in the real estate line; he drove the beguiled Easterner in buckboards out to look over lots and ranch property. Originally he came from one of the Gulf States; his lank six feet, slurring rhythm of speech and sectional idioms giving evidence of his birthplace.

And yet, after taking on Western adjustments, this languid pine-box whittler, cracker barrel hugger, shady corner lounger of the cotton fields and sumac hills of the South became famed as a bad man among men who had made life-long study of the art of truculence.

At nine the next morning Calliope was fit. Inspired by his own barbarous melodies and the contents of his jug, he was ready primed to gather fresh laurels from the diffident brow of Quicksand. Encircled and criss-crossed with cartridge belts, abundantly garnished with revolvers, and copiously drunk, he poured forth into Quicksand's main street. Too chivalrous to surprise and capture a town by silent sortie, he paused at the nearest corner and emitted his slogan — that fearful, brassy yell, so reminiscent of the steam piano, that had gained for him the classic appellation that had superseded his own baptismal name. Following close upon his vociferation came three shots from his forty-five by way of limbering up the guns and testing his aim. A yellow dog, the personal property of Colonel Swazey, the proprietor of the Occidental, fell feet upward in the dust with one farewell yelp. A Mexican, who was crossing the street from the Blue Front grocery, carrying in his hand a bottle of kerosene, was stimulated to a sudden and admirable burst of speed, still grasping the neck of the shattered bottle. The new gilt weathercock on Judge Riley's lemon and ultra-marine two-story residence shivered, flapped and hung by a splinter, the sport of the wanton breezes.

The artillery was in trim. Calliope's hand was steady. The

high, calm ecstacy of habitual battle was upon him, though slightly embittered by the sadness of Alexander in that his conquests were limited to the small world of Quicksand.

Down the street went Calliope, shooting right and left. Glass fell like hail; dogs vamosed; chickens flew, squawking; feminine voices shrieked concernedly to youngsters at large. The din was perforated at intervals by the *staccato* of the Terror's guns, and was drowned periodically by the brazen speech that Quicksand knew so well. The occasions of Calliope's low spirits were legal holidays in Quicksand. All along the main street, in advance of his coming, clerks were putting up shutters and closing doors. Business would languish for a space. The right of way was Calliope's, and as he advanced, observing the dearth of opposition and the few opportunities for distraction, his ennui perceptibly increased.

But, some four squares farther down, lively preparations were being made to minister to Mr. Catesby's love for interchange of compliments and repartee. On the previous night numerous messengers had hastened to advise Buck Patterson, the city marshal, of Calliope's impending eruption. The patience of that official, often strained in extending leniency toward the disturber's misdeeds, had been overtaxed. In Quicksand some indulgence was accorded the natural ebullition of human nature. Providing that the lives of the more useful citizens were not recklessly squandered, or too much property needlessly laid waste, the community sentiment was against a too strict enforcement of the law. But Calliope had raised the limit. His outbursts had been too frequent and too violent to come within the classification of a normal and sanitary relaxation of spirit.

Buck Patterson had been expecting and awaiting in his little ten by twelve frame office that preliminary yell announcing that Calliope was feeling blue. When the signal came, the City Marshal rose to his feet and buckled on his "sidekickers." Two deputy sheriffs and three citizens who had proved the edible qualities of fire also stood up, ready to bandy with Calliope leaden jocularities.

"Gather that fellow in," said Buck Patterson, setting forth the lines of the campaign. "Don't have no talk, but shoot as soon

as you can get a show. Keep behind cover and bring him down. He's a no-good 'un. It's up to Calliope to turn up his toes this time, I reckon. Go to him all spraddled out, boys. And don't git too reckless, for what Calliope shoots at he hits."

Buck Patterson, tall, muscular and solemn-faced, with his bright "City Marshal" badge shining on the breast of his blue flannel shirt, gave his posse directions for the onslaught upon Calliope. The plan was to accomplish the downfall of the Quicksand Terror without loss to the attacking party, if possible.

The splenetic Calliope, unconscious of retributive plots, was steaming down the channel, cannonading on either side, when he suddenly became aware of breakers ahead. The city marshal and one of the deputies rose up behind some dry-goods boxes half a square to the front, and opened fire. At the same time the rest of the posse, divided, shelled him from two side-streets, up which they were cautiously maneuvering from a well-executed détour.

The first volley broke the lock of one of Calliope's guns, cut a neat underbit in his right ear and exploded a cartridge in his crossbelt, scorching his ribs as it burst. Feeling braced up by this unexpected tonic to his spiritual depression, Calliope executed a fortissimo note from his upper register, and returned the fire like an echo. The upholders of the law dodged at his flash, but a trifle too late to save one of the deputies a bullet just above the elbow and the marshal a bleeding cheek from a splinter that a ball tore from the box he had ducked behind.

And now Calliope met the enemy's tactics in kind. Choosing with a rapid eye the street from which the weakest and least accurate fire had come, he invaded it at a double-quick, abandoning the unprotected middle of the street. With rare cunning the opposing force in that direction — one of the deputies and two of the valorous volunteers — waited, concealed by beer barrels, until Calliope had passed their retreat, and then peppered him from the rear. In another moment they were reinforced by the marshal and his other men, and then Calliope felt that in order to successfully prolong the delights of the controversy he must find some means of reducing the great odds against him. His eyes fell upon a structure that seemed to hold out this promise, providing he could reach it.

Not far away was the little railroad station, its building a strong box house, ten by twenty feet, resting upon a platform four feet above ground. Windows were in each of its walls. Something like a fort it might become to a man thus sorely pressed by superior numbers.

Calliope made a bold and rapid spurt for it, the marshal's crowd "smoking" him as he ran. He reached the haven in safety, the station agent leaving the building by a window, like a flying squirrel, as the garrison entered the door.

Patterson and his supporters halted under protection of a pile of lumber and held consultations. In the station was an unterrified desperado, who was an excellent shot and carried an abundance of ammunition. For thirty yards on each side of the besieged was a stretch of bare, open ground. It was a sure thing that the man who attempted to enter that unprotected area would be stopped by one of Calliope's bullets.

The city marshal was resolved. He had decided that Calliope Catesby should no more wake the echoes of Quicksand with his strident whoop. He had so announced. Officially and personally he felt imperatively bound to put the soft pedal on that instrument of discord. It played bad tunes.

Standing near was a hand truck used in the manipulation of small freight. It stood by a shed full of sacked wool, a consignment from one of the sheep ranches. On this truck the marshal and his men piled three heavy sacks of wool. Stooping low, Buck Patterson started for Calliope's fort, slowly pushing this loaded truck before him for protection. The posse, scattering broadly, stood ready to nip the besieged in case he should show himself in an effort to repel the juggernaut of justice that was creeping upon him. Only once did Calliope make demonstration. He fired from a window, and some tufts of wool spurted from the marshal's trustworthy bulwark. The return shots from the posse pattered against the window frame of the fort. No loss resulted on either side.

The marshal was too deeply engrossed in steering his protected battleship to be aware of the approach of the morning train until he was within only a few feet of the platform. The train was coming up on the other side of it. It stopped only one minute

at Quicksand. What an opportunity it would offer to Calliope! He had only to step out the other door, mount the train, and away.

Abandoning his breastworks, Buck, with his gun ready, dashed up the steps and into the room, driving open the closed door with one heave of his weighty shoulder. The members of the posse heard one shot fired inside, and then there was silence.

. . . . . .

At length the wounded man opened his eyes. After a blank space he could again see and hear, and feel, and think. Turning his eyes about, he found himself lying on a wooden bench. A tall man with a perplexed countenance, wearing a big badge with "City Marshal" engraved upon it, stood over him. A little old woman in black, with a wrinkled face and black sparkling eyes, was holding a wet handkerchief against one of his temples. He was trying to get these facts fixed in his mind and connected with past events when the old woman began to talk.

"There now, great, big, strong man! That bullet never tetched ye! Jest skeeted along the side of your head and sort of paralyzed ye for a spell. I've heerd of sech things afore; con-cussion is what they names it. Abel Wadkins used to kill squirrels that way — barkin' 'em, Abe called it. You jest been barked, sir, and you'll be all right in a little bit. Feel lots better already, don't ye? You just lay still a while longer and let me bathe your head. You don't know me, I reckon, and 'tain't surprisin' that you shouldn't. I come in on that train from Alabama to see my son. Big son, ain't he? Lands! you wouldn't hardly think he'd ever been a baby, would ye? This is my son, sir."

Half turning, the old woman looked up at the standing man, her worn face lighting with a proud and wonderful smile. She reached out one veined and calloused hand and took one of the man's. Then smiling cheerily down at the patient, she continued to dip the handkerchief in the waiting-room tin wash basin and gently apply it to his temple. She had the benevolent garrulity of old age.

"I ain't seen my son before," she continued, "in eight years. One of my nephews, Elkanah Price, he's a conductor on one of them railroads, and he got me a pass to come out here. I can stay a whole week on it, and then it'll take me back ag'in. Jest

think, now, that little boy of mine has got to be a officer — a city marshal of a whole town. That's somethin' like a constable, ain't it? I never knowed he was a officer; he didn't say nothin' about it in his letters. I reckon he thought his old mother'd be skeered about the danger he was in. But, laws! I never was much of a hand to git skeered. 'Tain't no use. I heard them guns a-shootin' while I was gittin' off them cars, and I see smoke a-comin' out of the depot, but I jest walked right along. Then I see son's face lookin' out through the window. I knowed him at oncet. He met me at the door, and squeezed me most to death. And there you was, sir, a-lying there jest like you was dead, and I 'lowed we'd see what might be done to help sot you up."

"I think I'll sit up now," said the concussion patient. "I'm feeling pretty fair by this time."

He sat, somewhat weakly yet, leaning against the wall. He was a rugged man, big-boned and straight. His eyes, steady and keen, seemed to linger upon the face of the man standing so still above him. His look wandered often from the face he studied to the marshal's badge upon the other's breast.

"Yes, yes, you'll be all right," — said the old woman, patting his arm, "if you don't get to cuttin' up agin, and havin' folks shootin' at you. Son told me about you, sir, while you was layin' senseless on the floor. Don't you take it as meddlesome fer an old woman with a son as big as you to talk about it. And you mustn't hold no grudge ag'in my son for havin' to shoot at ye. A officer has got to take up for the law — it's his duty — and them that acts bad and lives wrong has to suffer. Don't blame my son any, sir — 'tain't his fault. He's always been a good boy — good when he was growin' up, and kind and 'bedient and well-behaved. Won't you let me advise you, sir, not to do so no more? Be a good man, and leave liquor alone and live peaceably and godly. Keep away from bad company, work honest, sleep sweet."

The black-mittened hand of the old pleader gently touched the breast of the man she addressed. Very earnest and candid her old, worn face looked. In her rusty black dress and antique bonnet she sat, near the close of a long life, and epitomized the experience of the world. Still the man she spoke to gazed above her head, contemplating the silent son of the old mother.

"What does the marshal say?" he asked. "Does he believe the advice is good? Suppose the marshal speaks up and says if the talk's all right!"

The tall man moved uneasily. He fingered the badge on his breast for a moment, and then he put an arm around the old woman and drew her close to him. She smiled the unchanging mother smile of three-score years, and patted his big brown hand with her crooked, mittened fingers while her son spake.

"I say this," he said, looking squarely into the eyes of the other man, "that if I was in your place I'd follow it. If I was a drunken, desp'rate character, without shame or hope, I'd follow it. If I was in your place and you was in mine I'd say: "Marshal, I'm willin' to swear if you'll give me the chance I'll quit the racket. I'll drop the tanglefoot and the gun play, and won't play hoss no more. I'll be a good citizen and go to work and quit my foolishness. So help me God! That's what I'd say to you if you was marshal and I was in your place."

"Hear my son talkin'," said the old woman softly. "Hear him, sir. You promise to be good and he won't do you no harm. Forty-one year ago his heart first beat ag'in' mine, and it's beat true ever since."

The other man rose to his feet, trying his limbs and stretching his muscles.

"Then," said he, "if you was in my place and said that, and I was marshal, I'd say: 'Go free, and do your best to keep your promise.'"

"Lawsy!" exclaimed the old woman, in a sudden flutter, "ef I didn't clear forget that trunk of mine! I see a man settin' it on the platform jest as I seen son's face in the window, and it went plum out of my head. There's eight jars of home-made quince jam in that trunk that I made myself. I wouldn't have nothin' happen to them jars for a red apple."

Away to the door she trotted, spry and anxious, and then Calliope Catesby spoke out to Buck Patterson:

"I just couldn't help it, Buck. I seen her through the window a-comin' in. She never had heard a word 'bout my tough ways. I didn't have the nerve to let her know I was a worthless cuss bein' hunted down by the community. There you was, lyin'

where my shot laid you, like you was dead. The idea struck me sudden, and I just took your badge off and fastened it on to myself, and I fastened my reputation on to you. I told her I was the marshal and you was a holy terror. You can take your badge back now, Buck."

With shaking fingers Calliope began to unfasten the disc of metal from his shirt.

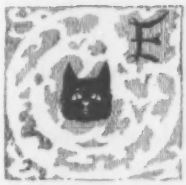
"Easy there!" said Buck Patterson. "You keep that badge right where it is, Calliope Catesby. Don't you dare to take it off till the train your mother leaves on is out of sight. You'll be city marshal of Quicksand as long as she's here to know it. After I stir around town a bit and put 'em on I'll guarantee that nobody won't give the thing away to her. And say, you leather-headed, rip-roarin', low-down son of a locoed cyclone, you follow that advice she give me! I'm goin' to take some of it myself too."

"Buck," said Calliope feelingly, "ef I don't, I hope I may—"

"Shut up," said Buck suddenly, "She's a-comin' back."

The Desert — and a Man.*

BY F. W. LUENING.



VEN the trail was gone. Only a line of telegraph poles remained, bleached yellow-white — as dry and dead as the land about them. Two wire threads flashed heat from pole to pole and quivered strangely. Stifling dust clouds settled on the teams, and the yellow wagons assumed the color of their freight — cement for the most. Men swore wearily as the caravan followed the metallic line. A sun-baked riverbed crossed their way. They stopped. From out of the bed protruded an iron pump and near it lay a crude trough of planks. So they found Cheepetah — The Well of Lost Water.

Four men watched the empty wagons disappear in the dust. A line of cement sacks marked Cheepetah, a pile of lumber and a tent. The four turned to work, for the sun beat upon them mercilessly. They erected a flimsy shed. It offered shade, and they rested. Under a cliff that towered sheer they pitched the tent. Then ate of canned beef and sank to weary, exhausted slumber. And the moon shone on the desert and the coyotes howled.

They awoke to days of toil. Sheltered from the burning rays they labored under their shed — moulding hollow blocks of cement. These they ranged neatly in long rows under a blazing sun — then staggered back to their refuge to curse and toil again. As the rows of finished blocks grew long the pile of cement sacks dwindled. So the four watched the line of telegraph poles. But the expected — the string of yellow, dust-covered wagons — did not come. The last of the cement sacks emptied, they waited. The rest was good. They smoked calmly under the shed. Heat waves simmered without and lizards played on the rocks. Within was drowsy peace and they sprawled on the sands, content.

The fiery disk of red sank into the western ledges. They sought

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the tent. The canned beef was gone, so they ate dried prunes. There was flour, and they baked biscuits. Then slept. A mountain rat came slyly out of the night. The glittering tin spoons fascinated. It nosed among them eagerly, upsetting the can with a crash. The Man stirred uneasily and the rat fled. It returned warily, later on. When the four awoke two spoons were gone — and the dried-up prunes. They drank coffee and finished the last of the oatmeal — then smoked — and waited — under the shed. The day passed idly away. Only the lizards stirred and a buzzard — high above.

The rat came again when they slept. It carried away another spoon. It found the flour and feasted freely. In the morning they had coffee and six biscuits between them, then returned to their vigil. No wagons came. The inactivity wore on their tempers and they quarrelled. There was only coffee for supper. They quarrelled more bitterly that night, then slept restlessly.

The Man heard the mountain rat rattle the spoon. He followed it out into the night — then forgot it. He bowed his head in his hands.

"God," he whispered, "it'll be hard to die — in such company."

Restless breathing came from the tent. Someone stirred and muttered oaths. The Man gulped. He arose and went to the pump. The iron handle lifted lightly and dropped clanging on to its rest. The valves offered no resistance. The Well of Lost Water was dry!

"It'll come sooner, now," he muttered dispassionately. He sat down on the empty well and slept.

With the morning came Thirst. Three men dug frantically in the well. The Man remained calm. He sat under the shed and smoked. The three labored long, but found no trace of moisture. Then they quarrelled fiercely — and fought. Unreasonable, brutish anger ruled them. Fear awoke the beast. The sun drove them to shelter, so they sank exhausted under the flimsy roof and glared at the telegraph poles. Nothing came. The sun shone cruelly and the sandstone ledges and the cactus quivered in the heat.

That evening they chewed coffee beans. There was no water. The Man shunned the tent. He lay down among the rocks. His

parched throat kept him awake. When he slept, feverishly, moaning a little, he dreamed. A coyote howled dismally, very near. He stirred, awoke, and stared hopelessly into the starlit skies above him. His eyes burned and his lips felt hot and cracked.

Only one man sat under the shed next day. He chewed an empty pipe. Near him lay three Things. Gaunt, haggard Things, that scanned the line of poles with glittering, animal eyes. Fear shone in the eyes — a restless, haunting fear. The Things watched one another furtively. They cursed thickly now and again and fought — blindly, causelessly — when the slow coming of the Desert Death goaded them to desperate, insane activity. Then they glowered at the Man — intently, wolfishly. Snakelike they edged nearer — nearer.

The Man saw the distant ledges tremble in the heat. He saw a ripple of water fleck the sandstone. Spreading, a river of blue flowed gently. It touched the parched hills. A mat of green o'erspread them. Trees grew, and there came people. Great crowds of people, who cheered wildly, and flaunted colored banners. A boat appeared. A long, narrow, tapering boat, that cut into the waters and sped swiftly — all too swiftly. Bare-armed figures rowed with the regularity and precision of a machine. Oars flashed beautifully in the sun. Then, strangely, the Man felt every nerve a-tingle. Vaguely he knew he must fight — fight hard. He felt the sun strike his bare arms and shoulders. The desert sun. No — the — the — why, the sun that shone on the Hudson — of course. He panted. He strained every muscle. Suddenly he heard a voice. It was counting — sharply, decisively! "One, two! one, two! Hit 'er up! Take the stroke! One, two!"

The Man bent to his task — his oar flew. He heard the gurgle of the water. He must win — they must win. His 'Varsity — his crew. They were gaining — gaining. Out of one corner of his eye he saw the other boat; two flashing oars, then three; then four; then only three again. The Man gasped. How hot it was — how dry his throat! He wanted so to drink — drink — of that cool, blue water. But he couldn't — he couldn't. He must row — they must win. Suddenly they forged ahead. He heard a crash and a rending of wood. He saw the other boat strike

something — go to pieces on a rock — a sandbar — a ledge. The river sank into the dust and the green died out of the hills.

The Man stared stupidly at his hands. He felt faint — sick. Three Things lay under the shed. They cursed and wept hysterically and grovelled at his feet. Bruised, bleeding, beaten Things, with battered heads and delirious, hunted eyes.

A hard, dry sob shook the Man. He staggered out into the blinding light — fell — and staggered on. Then crawled painfully over the scorched sands. Trembling frightfully he drew himself up. He clawed at a pole — a telegraph pole. Weakly he held himself in upright position. He babbled thickly.

"Love — life — a Man — no quitter — fight," then shook off his delirium and tried to think.

"Wires," he muttered, "help — save them."

He looked up at the threads of steel above him. They were very low — just out of reach. He stretched up an arm, then fell heavily and rolled into the dry riverbed. And night came and the stars.

A coyote circled warily around the inert body. It approached, sniffed uneasily, and scratched in the baked sand; then dug quickly down — down.

The Man stirred. The coyote fled and howled dolefully in the moonlight. The Man, moaning miserably, dragged himself on.

"No quitter — fight — wires," he whispered, then pitched forward in sudden weakness. His head hung over the hole where the coyote had scratched. His neck muscles relaxed. His seared lips touched the sand. It was moist and cool! Desperate, despairing energy came upon him. He clawed the wet earth into his mouth, he sucked every little, life-giving drop from the gritty, alkaline soil — then clawed again and grovelled, his face in the mud. Bye and bye reason returned and strength. The Man scooped out handfuls of the saturated sand and drank greedily — but sanely.

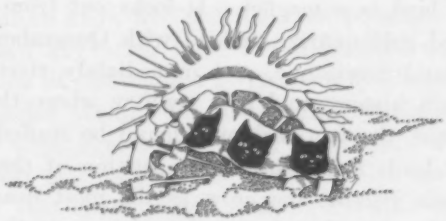
He arose. With infinite, patient, heart-breaking toil he built a pyramid of stones. From its top he could just touch the wires. Another stone and another. He mounted his pile laboriously, swayed dizzily and clutched — blindly, wildly — at the steel line above him. His fingers closed convulsively. Then he lurched

forward — and the wire snapped off short. Minutes passed — hours — ages. The Man lay exhausted, breathing weakly. Another struggle and he regained his feet. He remounted the pyramid. The other wire snapped. And he fell and lay very still.

. . . . . .

The government mule-teams left the fort. Four troopers scanned the telegraph line carefully. Fifty, sixty, seventy miles, and they found the break — and the Man. Cool, wet sand was in his hands and he tottered to the shed, unseeing. The Things scarcely breathed. He pressed the sand to their lips. Carefully, methodically he passed from one to the next. Then sought the riverbed again to bring more sand. The troopers stopped him, gently.

"No," he murmured. He reeled. "No — must save them — no quitter — fight — win." And he sank limply into their arms.



Parkinson's Lightning Calculator.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

N the old St. Kilda road, a few miles outside of Melbourne, the queen city of Australia, stands "Parkinson's Palace." It is the most unique establishment of its kind in the southern hemisphere. Globe-trotters whose names are on the registers of The Savoy in London, Shepheard's at Cairo, Watson's at Bombay, and many other famous hostelries on the world's broad breast, are startled out of that indifference born of travel when they enter Parkinson's hotel — or rather the magnificently appointed bar-room, which is the chief attraction. The place has distinction and originality. Parkinson had an idea, and in the building of The Palace he saw that the idea was carried out.

The first object that strikes the eye of the visitor is a stuffed crow that directs a lifelike stare upon the crowds that throng the bar. The bird is a magnet. It looks out from a gorgeous case of polished gold quartz, studded with Queensland fire-opals and New Zealand greenstone, and immediately rivets attention. This crow has a history, and in a country where the species is universally hated, the fact that one should be stuffed and elaborately encased leads to a continual repetition of the story. As every Australian regards the crow as the most deadly and despised foe of the sheep-breeder, native visitors to the hotel look upon this specimen, with its glistening diamond eyes, as a personal insult, until the proprietor has explained that this crow was an exception — the one solitary exception on the entire island continent that brought prosperity instead of desolation and disaster.

Parkinson was a small sheep farmer on the Gippsland hills till the drought of 1891 swept over the land. That year put him out of business. The crows feasted on his dead and dying sheep,

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fire swept through his pasture, and, finally, the bank seized his property on account of an overdue mortgage. Included in the few head of stock taken over with the farm, was a thoroughbred colt, upon which Parkinson set great hopes, so his ruin was complete. The unfortunate man's wife died from the shock of the disaster, leaving him to care for the only child, a girl of six.

It was shortly after his wife's death that Parkinson got an idea. Some weeks before, one of the stockmen had brought the lonely child a young crow to play with, and Parkinson, hating the bird with all the true bushman's hate, decided to kill it before leaving the sheep run. But fate intervened. An attachment had sprung up between the child and the bird. The crow's cunning capers, of which it never tired, greatly amused the little girl, and while Parkinson watched the two playing in the shadow of the homestead, an inspiration came. He packed the bird up with his few belongings and removed to the nearest township.

Three months afterwards his name became a household word among the farmers on the bronzed plains. Parkinson appeared at the small agricultural shows, race meetings, and dog exhibitions, and he startled the natives by giving performances in which a tame crow was the shining star. *The bird was a lightning calculator of the first water.*

The bushmen know well that the crow possesses ten times more cunning than any other bird, but they were not prepared for the exhibition of intelligence given them by Parkinson's pet. Its feats astounded them. The extraordinary ability it displayed in dealing with figures left them speechless. They had heard of horses that had been trained to distinguish between numerals, but a crow that could juggle with figures like the actuary of a life insurance company was something new in their experience of life. Gippsland gasped. Men rode fifty miles from the ranges to see the marvel, and went away amazed.

Two months after the crow made its début, its fame had spread so rapidly that Parkinson refused a score of offers from the proprietors of circuses and music halls, and arguing wisely that he could successfully manage his own feathered wonder in the larger cities, he hired a theatre in Melbourne, and wealth started to roll in upon him.

The Calculating Crow took the town by storm. Its feats were marvellous. It revelled in figures. Addition, subtraction, multiplication and division seemed to be the joy of its life, and the people came in thousands to view the marvel.

By nodding its head smartly the bird invariably gave the correct result to the sums, no matter how difficult, that were placed before it on a blackboard. Thus, if the answer to a sum was two hundred and thirty-seven, the crow would nod twice, pause a moment, then nod three times, and after another little interval give seven smart bobs of its shiny black head. It made no mistakes. Parkinson acted as interlocutor, and standing at the blackboard encouraged the audience to call out sums of all kinds, which he chalked upon the board to be worked out by the feathered prodigy.

Even in mental arithmetic the crow's skill was remarkable. The boy who wanted to know the cost of two dozen apples at two pence half-penny each, received his reply offhand in five quick nods to signify five shillings, and more intricate problems were disposed of in the same fashion. The bird also gave the dates of the most important events in the world's history. By a single nod, eight nods, one nod, and then five, it told the date of the Battle of Waterloo, and answered in like manner questions concerning the discovery of Australia, the accession of Queen Victoria and matters of a like nature.

The city of Melbourne went wild over the crow. The performance was unique. Statesmen, school teachers, lawyers and divines came to see and wonder, and the press was flooded by writers who argued lengthily concerning the opinion of different ornithologists who had written upon the brain power of birds. Doctors examined the size and shape of the feathered calculator's head when it was not busy figuring out the answers to the thousands of questions put by the big audiences, and they decided that the bird had a brain that was abnormally developed. The crow became the one topic of conversation. Thousands of school children were brought to see the bird, and the fame of The Lightning Calculator spread across the continent. Parkinson became rich, and as he thought over the drought days on the sheep run he pondered over the strange ways of Fate. Crows

had helped to ruin him by plucking the eyes out of his starving sheep, and yet a single crow had now brought him affluence!

Then something happened. The Governor of the colony wished to witness the performance, and in company with his aides-de-camp he attended Parkinson's theatre. Parkinson was delighted. The Governor was the representative of royalty, and his visit was a distinct honor to the show.

Shortly after the performance began it became apparent that the crow was in a bad humor. It bobbed its head sullenly when answering questions put by the audience, and Parkinson, by gently stroking and patting the bird, tried vainly to put it in its usual happy mood. But the performer became more irritable as the minutes went by.

When the Governor intimated that he wished to propound a question, the house was instantly hushed. He was a small, stout personage, and when he rose and looked straight at the crow, the latter returned the stare. Parkinson, detecting a look of annoyance in the bird, breathed heavily as the exalted one propounded his problem.

"If — er — fourteen bananas cost one shilling and two pence," stammered the pompous dignitary, "how much will one banana cost?"

His Excellency sat down but the crow made no movement. It stared at the questioner as if it had been suddenly petrified. Parkinson, standing on one side of the stage, mopped the perspiration from his forehead and looked around uneasily. It was evident that something was wrong. The small boys in the gallery began to make remarks, which led to an uproar. Suddenly the crow started to pick violently at its right leg, and Parkinson made frantic signals to lower the curtain. The last glimpse the audience got of the performing crow showed them that feathered marvel rolling over and over and picking madly at something they could not see.

It was a *Herald* reporter who discovered the secret. When he dashed behind the stage to discover the reason why the bird had refused to answer the question put by Lord Marmaduke Errington, he found Parkinson cutting a piece of thread from a dead crow's leg.

"You can tell the world now," muttered Parkinson. "The crow is dead and I'm not going to the trouble to train another."

And so it happened that the *Herald* of the next morning contained this paragraph:

> A piece of thread tied round the bird's leg and held by a man in the wings, who could see the blackboard and hear each question, was the simple solution of the mystery. The crow had been trained to bob its head each time the thread was pulled. That His Excellency's question remained unanswered was due to the fact that the thread had become tangled round the bird's toes and it refused to respond to the usual signal.

But Luck did not forsake Parkinson. He found that the colt that he had been forced to part with when he lost his farm was entered in the Melbourne Cup, the richest purse in the world, and he determined to back him heavily. Glenloth started at fifty to one, carrying two thousand pounds of the fortune made by the crow, and the year 1892, when that brilliant outsider ran away from his field, will never be forgotten at Flemington. Parkinson built The Palace out of his winnings, sent his daughter to Europe to be educated, and settled down to a life of ease. But he honored the dead crow. And that is why the bird that had the distinction of being questioned by the representative of royalty sits in its gorgeous case and with its diamond eyes surveys the thirsty tourists that come from all parts of the globe. It is the only protected crow in Australia — the only crow that ever brought money instead of ruin to a woolgrower.

After Many Days.*

BY ROBERT COOKE BICKNELL.

THROUGH the fields, fast browning under the October sun, a boy of fifteen trudged despondently. A light rifle of the muzzle-loading type was across his shoulder, a string of squirrels trailed behind.

Reaching the fence by the roadside, he climbed upon the topmost rail and, on this precarious perch, proceeded to charge his piece anew. A thimbleful of black powder first, the last charge of a half pound that had cost three dollars in Confederate money at the country store. While this was a high price, no doubt, yet it was not so high as it seems — for the value of Confederate money was problematical in the fall of '64. Next, a small flattened bullet, the last in the pouch. Lead had long since become unobtainable. Then the pewter spoons in the kitchen had gone to shoot squirrels and snipe, and this was the last of a broken silver spoon which he had surreptitiously obtained and melted with much difficulty in the old iron ladle, and cast in the moulds that looked so much like a pair of old-fashioned candle snuffers. Indeed, the last one had not melted completely and was scant in measure, so that on the side from which the neck should have projected was a flattened surface on which could be plainly seen a little laureled crown, the hall-mark of the maker. The placing of a percussion-cap upon the nipple completed the process of re-loading, and for a time he sat, his rifle across his knees — looking down the dusty country road.

There presently emerged from the woodland, half a mile away, a most unusual spectacle. A dozen horses showed first from their enveloping cloud of dust, and following, came long lines of marching men, in dust-covered blue uniforms. Although he had never seen a Yankee soldier before in his life, the boy knew, at

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once, that this was a part of the great Union army of which he had lately heard so much. With instinctive caution he drew himself into the overhanging branches of a tree and watched with eager eyes the approaching procession. First passed the mounted officers, then long lines of foot soldiers, followed by several field pieces and a number of lumbering ammunition wagons — all raising such a cloud of dust that he was well nigh stifled on his perch in the tree.

When all had gone and he was concluding that he might safely descend, two men in nondescript garb — camp-followers evidently — came slouching along and paused in the shade of the very tree in which the boy was hiding.

"It was about here somewhere," one of the men was saying, "A farmhouse near the road, a likely looking bay colt grazing in the lot and a pretty woman on the porch," and he looked meaningly at the other and laughed, — a harsh, sneering laugh.

The boy grasped the little rifle tightly and his face flushed hotly. What right had these rough men to mention thus his mother — his modest, dainty mother? For his home was the only house near the road for miles, and his own bay colt was loose in the lot by the house, while his mother habitually sat in the mornings on the wide porch fronting the road.

Without having said more, the men moved on, but the boy had heard enough. As soon as the men were out of sight he dropped down and hurried, by a way he well knew, which would bring him to the back of the house.

He had need to hurry, for the men were already at the house when he came up.

One had skilfully caught the horse and was in the act of fastening a saddle on his back, while the other, the spokesman under the tree, was bowing low in mock courtesy before the boy's mother, who stood in the doorway, pale and frightened, but resolutely barring the way to the ruffian who was seeking to enter the house.

"With your kind permission," he was saying, "We will dine with you today. Then we will take a look at the silver, and surely so fair a lady — " he broke off, to take a leering look into her face, stooping slightly, which proceeding the lady so resented that she gave him a slap fair on his cheek that turned him half round.

At this instant the boy vaulted the fence and cried "Mother," raising his rifle as he lighted on his feet. The man, seeing this, ran, and, with one bound, landed astride the astonished horse behind his comrade, who was already mounted in the saddle. The horse was moving briskly by this time, and the two were almost around the corner of a little wood when the boy reached the front of the house. Without hesitating, however, he took aim at the man behind and fired. As the horse turned the corner, the boy saw the two men leaning far over — the one in front supporting his companion. Turning, he was just in time to catch his mother, who fell, fainting, in his arms. When she regained consciousness, a few moments afterward, the boy was sobbing violently.

"I am all right now, my boy," she said, patting his cheek as he bent over her. "But it isn't only that," he said, between sobs, "I am afraid I killed the man." So much did he dread the confirmation of his fear that he carefully avoided going near the corner of the wood around which the men had disappeared.

The next day they went away to the North, he and his mother, and before they returned, five years had passed. The war was over, and the period of reconstruction was well nigh passed. Realizing the needs of the prostrate South, the boy, now a young man of twenty, had come, after only one term at the Medical College, to practise for a year or two under his father's tuition, while he accumulated sufficient money to defray the expenses of another year at college — a common custom in those days.

"You will need to study too," his father had told him, after the day's rest from the journey was over, "and all my anatomical specimens were destroyed in the fire which the tramps following Sherman's army kindled in my office about the time you went away."

"With all the skeletons lying scattered throughout the country just now, it should be easy to find one for your study," he added, a little grimly.

"I kin gib him a Yankee's skull, ef dat will do," said an old darky, who had remained faithfully with the old Doctor during all these years, and who, from having associated with them, as it were, in the Doctor's office, had lost much of the darky's fear of skeletons.

"And where did you get such a thing?" asked the young man.

"I foun' hit in de woods by de big road jist beyan' de house, more'n a year ago," the darky explained, and in spite of his added years, and the time which had elapsed, the young man felt some of the dread which had so oppressed him on the day before his departure, five years before.

"Bring it to me then," he said shortly, and in a few minutes he held in his hands a skull, bleached on one side and stained on the other, showing that it had lain long upon the ground, the upper side exposed to the sun.

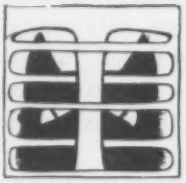
In one of the bones of the left side, just behind the opening for the ear, was a small, round hole; on the other side was no corresponding opening.

"Must be inside," he muttered to himself, "or may have dropped out."

With a small chisel he pried off the fan-shaped temporal bone from the left side, the interlocking sutures resisting strongly the efforts of his nervous hands. Finally it was released from the tenacious grasp of the last stubborn serration, and turning the skull so that the light fell full on the opposite side of the interior, he saw, wedged into the inner table of that part of the skull nearly corresponding to the right temple, a small, flattened bullet, and plainly to be seen on its surface was a little laureled crown.

The Resurrection of Peter.*

BY GEORGE HENRY ELLERTON.



THE old man with the bent shoulders hobbled through the gate of the penitentiary and followed the officer into the warden's room. There he stood staring helplessly round till the man at the desk stopped writing and looked up inquiringly.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

The visitor started nervously.

"It's about my son," he murmured; "he's in here."

There was a moment's silence, the prison official evidently thinking that his visitor would continue, but the old man hung his head and remained quiet.

"What is his name?" asked the warden.

The ancient straightened himself up and looked squarely at his questioner.

"His real name is Peter Halsbury," he replied, "but he ain't in here under his real name. Look, mister, it's like this. Peter was the best boy that ever lived, but he loved a girl, an' when she went back on him he jest got a little wild. You know, mister, a lot of young fellers do that. But he's a good boy."

The warden nodded. He had heard the same story many times, but he had sympathy to spare for the old man who tried to shield his son.

"It was jest that girl goin' back on him," repeated the visitor. "Pete was a straight 'un up till then. He had a heart bigger'n any boy around the place, an' he wasn't afraid of much. Then as I told you he went wild a bit, an' I hear as he got into this box. Young Dud Peters told me he was here, an' Dud knows."

The warden pulled the heavy register towards him and looked over the pages.

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"There is no Peter Halsbury in here," he said.

The old man moved closer.

"No, I told you he wouldn't be here under his right name. But he's here all right, an' I jest wish I could see him. See, mister, it's like this. I'm jest run to the length of my chain, fair petered out, an' I'd like to see the boy 'fore I go west to die. I've come a good way to see him, mister. He's my only son, an' he was a mighty good son up to the time that girl fooled 'im. I'd jest like to shake his hand if it could be fixed. He was a good boy, an' if he knew that his old dad wanted to speak to him he — he —"

The old man's voice died away in a faint whisper, and the warden fumbled nervously with his papers.

"I will make an attempt to find your son," he said, slowly. "If you come back in three hours I might have news for you."

The long lines of convicts were drawn up in front of the workshops before being marched to their cells for their midday meal, when the warden stepped forward and addressed them.

"An old man called here this morning to see his son," he said, quietly. "He thinks it will be his last opportunity of seeing him, as he is very old and is now going west to die. But the son is here under an assumed name, and we cannot locate him. Now I am going to call the man's right name, but before doing so I will give him warning. If he thinks that the fact of his real name being known to the authorities might lead to further prosecution he may keep quiet. If he doesn't, he can see his father who will return to the jail after dinner. The name is Peter Halsbury."

There was a shuffling of many feet along the line when the name was called. Convicts gave sighs of relief and glanced at each other wonderingly. Each man thought that Peter Halsbury, if he was in the long lines, would be a considerable fool if he made himself known, and they nudged one another to express their contempt of the warden's tactics.

"A nice idiot he'd be to own up," murmured a low-browed man in the rear rank, and his companions snickered.

"Peter Halsbury is the name," repeated the warden.

There was a moment of tense silence, then a broad-shouldered man in the rear rank pushed his way through the line in front, took two steps forward and stood to attention. The warden and the prison officials stared. The prisoner who had stepped forward was known as John Gregory.

"I am Peter Halsbury," he said, quietly. "I would like to speak to my father when he returns."

That afternoon father and son conversed for a short twenty minutes in the visitors' room, but while they were bidding each other an affectionate farewell, the Law was busy. The warden of Entwala penitentiary communicated the fact of the resurrection of Peter Halsbury to the authorities, and those authorities were busy looking up records to see if Peter was wanted for some other offense. And the Law did not seek in vain. Peter Halsbury had slipped twice from the path of virtue, but for the first slip he did not pay a penalty because the Law was not familiar with his whereabouts. Thus it came to pass that the same train that took old Halsbury west to die, carried his son to the county seat to stand his trial for an offense committed two years previous.

The attorney for the people who conducted the prosecution of Peter Halsbury made a brilliant effort in stating the case to the jury. The crowd in the courtroom shuddered as they listened to the remarkable manner in which retribution followed the evildoer.

"This man," cried the attorney, "has been a fugitive from Justice for two years. But Justice is surefooted and tireless, gentlemen. Emerson has said that Crime and Punishment grow upon the one stalk, and the hand that plucks the one will surely gather the other. Halsbury's case is an example. He was an inmate of Entwala penitentiary under the assumed name of Gregory, but by a curious little happening, one of those little incidents that upset the best plans of criminals, his real name became known, and he was dragged to the bar of Justice."

The courtroom applauded the effort of the prosecuting attorney when he took his seat, after demanding a verdict of guilty, but the prisoner sat grim and defiant. The presiding judge asked if

he had any defense, but he shook his head sadly. An attempt to defend himself seemed a mere waste of words to Peter Halsbury at that moment. The jury retired and in three minutes returned with a verdict of guilty, and the prisoner was sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

In the little corridor where the sentenced prisoners waited before being conveyed to the jail, an inquisitive officer who had listened to the trial, inquired how the authorities had discovered Halsbury's real name, and the prisoner told the story of his father's visit.

"I don't mind the four years," he said, "but if my old dad knew I got it through owning up to my right name for the sake of a twenty-minute chat with him, it would about end him."

The officer took out his tobacco pouch and passed some of its contents to the prisoner as they moved forward.

"There's no need to tell you to keep your mouth shut about me giving you this tobacco," he whispered. "You're made of good stuff if you have slipped a cog."

And the heart of Peter Halsbury was comforted much by the assurance.

Treated by Proxy.*

BY HAROLD EYRE.

THERE was a sudden movement in the little crowd of newsboys, district messengers and youths of no visible occupation, as Horace Ransom's well-known team of bays drew up at the side entrance to his huge dry-goods store. A tall porter in livery opened the door of the carriage, and Ransom descended to the pavement.

For a moment he stood there, facing the expectant crowd that he could not see. Then he thrust his hand into his pocket and flung to right and left the customary handful of coins. Smiling grimly at the familiar sounds of the scuffle which followed, Ransom took the porter's arm and entered the building.

Upon reaching his office, he sent for men in charge of departments and conferred with them. Then his secretary read to him the morning's mail, for Ransom took pride in maintaining, despite his affliction, an active supervision of the great business he had built up.

While he was dictating a letter to a Western manufacturer, the office boy came in to announce a caller.

"Dr. Hoffman, sir."

"Dr. Hoffman?" repeated Ransom.

"That eye man," explained the Secretary, "who wrote you."

Ransom sighed wearily. "Show him in."

An elderly man entered the room, tall, with stooping shoulders, angular and shabbily dressed.

The merchant turned his head towards the visitor, with a movement pathetically like an enquiring glance.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I have written," began the old man, "asking you to allow me to treat your eyes."

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"I received your letter," said Ransom curtly. "I suppose you have heard about the reward."

The caller was embarrassed. "That is true, but——"

"You needn't be ashamed of it," interrupted Ransom. "A million dollars is a lot of money, and since I offered it, seven years ago, to any man who could restore my sight, a good many people have been after it, from the greatest specialists in the world to the greatest humbugs. But none of them has earned the reward, though I've given them all a fair show."

"Nobody, I understand, has benefited you at all?"

"Not a particle. I've tried about every system of treatment under the sun, from electric vibrations to the violet ray. They tell me it's a disease of the nerve — neurasthenia, they call it, which I suppose is their way of saying they don't know just what it is. Whatever it may be, I'm afraid it is incurable.

"That's what the German doctors told me years ago, but I wouldn't believe it then — I couldn't believe it. It seemed to me that somewhere in the world there *must* be someone who knew more than the others about my particular sort of blindness. So I offered that reward — everybody thought I was crazy as well as blind — and for years afterwards my life was made miserable by people who thought they needed the money.

"I had hopes then, and listened to them all, tried all their systems and let them experiment on me, until I couldn't stand it any longer. No one can imagine what I went through. The physical torture some of them put me to was bad enough, but the way they tricked me and lied to me, filled me with false hopes and tried every dodge to make a profit out of my——"

He stopped and relapsed into silence.

"I trust, sir," said the old man, with dignity, "that you do not class me among those charlatans. My letter, I had hoped, would convince you that I have some standing in my profession. I have studied for many years the diseases of the optic nerve, and I believe I can cure you. If I succeed, you will have your sight again, and I shall have earned the reward. If I fail, you will have lost only the time you give to the treatment. All I ask is an opportunity to see what I can do with your case."

"What is the principle of your treatment?" inquired Ransom,

"That is something I am not prepared to explain. I could hardly make clear to you in a few moments the results of a lifetime of study."

Ransom was silent.

"Come back at the same hour tomorrow," he said at length. "I have very little faith left, but you shall have your opportunity — if you care to take it on my conditions."

When Dr. Hoffman was shown into Ransom's office the next morning, he found a third person in the room, a dark, thick-set man of about forty.

"Mr. Martin," began Ransom, indicating the dark man, "is afflicted with what the doctors say is precisely the same form of blindness as mine. For some years past I have retained his services, so to speak, to test various systems of treatment that were to restore my sight. I found some such arrangement necessary, for I am too busy a man to give much time to doubtful experiments, and I like to give everything a trial. If it is possible for you to benefit me, it will be evident in your treatment of Mr. Martin; and as soon as you have any success with him, you can begin on me. Now you can suit yourself as to whether you care to undertake the case."

"But," objected Hoffman, "it will probably be some time before——"

"Exactly. That is why I want to see results first."

The other hesitated.

"It's an unusual proposition," he said finally, "to treat a patient by proxy — but I'll do my best."

For several weeks the treatment continued without incident and without apparent result. Martin reported from time to time to his employer, but the latter evinced slight interest in the matter, not even inquiring as to Hoffman's methods. Constant disappointment had left the merchant with little hope.

One morning he was in bad humor when Martin came.

"I don't see the use of wasting any more time on that man," he said irritably. "It's nearly two months now, and he hasn't done you a bit of good."

"He seems confident that he will succeed," replied Martin; "somehow, I'm beginning to have faith in him."

"What does he do to you?"

"That's what I don't know much about — he doesn't seem to want to explain things. But he uses some kind of rays that he gets from a tube, and he has an apparatus to produce what he calls high frequency vibrations. It has a queer effect. You don't notice anything at the time, but afterwards, quite a while afterwards, your eyes begin to sort of tingle. He says that means the circulation is gradually coming back to the nerve."

"Circulation poppycock!" snapped Ransom. "It's my belief the man's a faker, like the rest of 'em. It's a wonder he hasn't asked me for a loan, or some money on account. It would take just that to convince me."

"I think, sir, he's pretty hard up," ventured Martin; "and after all, he may be on the right track. I suppose you wouldn't feel like helping him out a bit?"

"Not by a jugful! I've done enough foolishness of that kind in the past, and it's time to quit. I'm tired of being an easy mark."

About two weeks after that conversation, Dr. Hoffman called at the merchant's office.

"Mr. Ransom's busy," announced the boy, after taking in the name.

The visitor stood still, apparently taken aback by the message. The boy noticed that he looked thinner and shabbier than when he called before.

"Tell him, please," said the caller, laying his hand nervously on the boy's arm, "that it is urgent. I shall only keep him a moment."

The lad was about to say that it was no use for him to go back, but something in the man's manner disarmed him, and he reentered the private room. Upon emerging, he conducted Hoffman inside.

Ransom's greeting was not cordial.

"Well, Professor," he said, with scornful emphasis on the second word, "I hear you're not having much success with Martin."

"It is a little soon," replied the visitor, "we must have patience. The case is an obstinate one——"

"No more so than mine would be. If you can't cure Martin——"

"I have not said I can't cure him. I have great expectations. There are signs which lead me to hope for favorable results at any moment."

"Your hopes and expectations don't interest me," was the sharp rejoinder. "I have heard that before, — it is an old story. Have you nothing else to say to me?"

"Yes, there is something else." The visitor's manner became embarrassed. He stammered, and almost guiltily averted his gaze from the other's sightless eyes.

"I hesitate to mention it, but — the expense of the treatment is greater than I anticipated — of course I know I am not entitled to anything unless it is successful, but I am in need — desperate need, and I thought ——"

"No, siree!" thundered Ransom, "not one cent! It's just as I suspected, you're like all the rest of them. But I'll not running a charitable institution, and I haven't lost my wits as well as my eyesight. Enough of this humbug! I shall notify Martin to waste no more ——"

He stopped short in his tirade. The sound of receding footsteps and the opening and shutting of the door told him of his visitor's retreat.

That same day Ransom sent for Martin and informed him that Dr. Hoffman's experiments were at an end.

Thereupon Ransom dismissed the matter from his mind. He thought no more of it until a memorable morning some ten days later when, arriving downtown, he found the porter, for the first time in long years of service, shaken out of his massive dignity.

Without giving his employer a chance to protest, the big negro seized him by the arm and hurried him into the office, muttering something about "a miracl' ob de Lawd, foh shuah!"

Upon entering the room Ransom, with the sharpened faculties of the blind, instantly became aware that a little group of people had gathered there, and his keen perceptions caught the air of expectancy that surrounded him. But he had no inkling of the truth.

Out of the darkness came the voice of his superintendent.

"We have news for you, Mr. Ransom, great news. Martin has recovered his sight!"

"I don't believe it," said Ransom in a blank voice.

Then he heard Martin himself, incoherent, almost hysterical, telling with unnecessary detail how he had gone to bed the night before with his eyes in their usual state, and in the morning, lo, he could see. And after fourteen years ——

Ransom made an effort to control himself.

"That man Hoffman," he ejaculated, as soon as he could find speech, "— when did you see him last?"

"Not since the day he called on you."

"Where does he live?"

"He moved just about that time. He's living now on the East Side, in Fifty-fourth Street."

"Go to him at once!" shouted Ransom. "Take my carriage — bring him back with you. Don't delay a moment!"

After a break-neck drive, the vehicle stopped in front of a squalid house, a few doors east of Third Avenue. Martin dashed up the steps and rang the bell.

Receiving no answer, he rang again. At length a woman came to the door.

"Is Dr. Hoffman here?" he inquired.

She looked at him curiously. "His body's upstairs," she responded, "— third floor back."

"His body!" gasped Martin. "You don't mean ——"

He stopped.

"He was found dead," she explained, "yesterday morning."

Martin staggered back. "What was the matter with him?"

The woman slowly surveyed the carriage in the street, and then looked at the white face of the man before her.

"Starvation," she said bitterly, "just plain starvation!"

The End of the Story.*

BY DONALD MACDONALD.

THE fourth mate, the ship's cook and the yogi sat under an awning on a strip of sandy coast and talked of the sea which had been the cause of half their trouble. At their backs, supporting the awning, stood a meagerly furnished shack, their temporary home. A little to one side, beyond the water's farthest reach, ranged six graves, parallel to the sea and partly shaded by a row of scraggly palms.

Less than a week before a ship had gone down in a storm off the Bahama banks. The mate, the cook and the wise man had escaped in a boat, to be picked up later by a fishing schooner and landed at a Florida town. There had been a fourth sailor, but he had died of the dreaded blue plague soon after reaching port. So his companions had been hurried to the pest house, where they now were, with a hospital orderly who had volunteered to remain by them during the period of incubation and attend them in case they were stricken with the terrible disease.

The mate and the cook were men of only average intelligence, but the yogi had been a person of distinction in the tropical village from which he came. He was a man of intellectual attainments and had shipped in the humble capacity of captain's servant in order to see the world and add to his store of knowledge.

The sun had gone down in the stunted scrub oaks and the air grew chill. The three men moved inside the shack and drew up to the table where the orderly sat reading. He closed his book presently and questioned them concerning the world as they had seen it. As the evening wore on they began telling stories to relieve the tedium of their confinement. When it came the mate's turn he said:

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"This is the story I heard in Mozambique in the drinking house of Louis, the old Frenchman. It was told by a Dutch trader in pearls, and concerns the kingdom of Ecbahambra on the east coast of Africa. Perhaps it will interest you.

"The king of Ecbahambra is said to be a progressive and broad-minded man, whose highest aim in life is to lift his people out of their semi-barbarous condition. He has instituted many reforms, but perhaps his most worthy act was the suppression of the opium vice.

"Chinese merchants in great junks used to call at Ecbahambra to trade with the natives, and it was they who introduced the smoking of opium. The vice spread so rapidly that it threatened to demoralize the whole tribe, and the king saw that he must adopt drastic measures to crush it. So, after much thought, he decreed that every person found guilty of using the drug should die. After one or two executions the habit was checked, although many people still smoked in secret.

"Now the king had three wives, after the custom of his country, who were known as the great queen, the middle queen, and the little queen. The great queen was the favorite with the monarch. She had been given to him by a neighboring ruler and was the most beautiful and most hated woman in the country. The other queens hated her because of her beauty. The chief men of the kingdom hated her because of her influence with the king.

"So she lived a miserable life, tormented by her enemies and the victim of innumerable intrigues to overthrow her. The lesser queens set their maids to watch her and the chief men placed spies in the royal household to report on everything which she did. They all hoped to detect her in some wrong-doing and thus accomplish her downfall.

"Unknown to the king the great queen became a victim of the opium habit. Even after he issued his edict of death she continued in the use of the drug. In time knowledge of her vice came to the middle and the little queen. They talked the matter over in private and resolved to tell the chief men what they had heard concerning their rival, because they dared not accuse her openly to their royal husband."

The fourth mate paused abruptly in his story and the other

men looked up in wonder. They saw a blue pallor spread over his face, his eyes rolled in their sockets and he half fell across the table. When they raised his head he was already unconscious, and in half an hour he was dead. Thus quickly does the blue plague strike down its victims.

The orderly telephoned to the town officials, who directed him to dig a grave and bury the corpse at once. So the two remaining sailors and the attendant turned up the loose sand under the palms and when the body was cold covered it from sight.

The next day the two sailors hardly spoke a word. The sudden leave-taking of their comrade, and fears for their own safety, cast a terrible gloom over their minds. When the orderly could endure the silence no longer he remarked: "It's too bad the mate didn't finish his story. It promised to be interesting. I wonder if the great queen was executed."

Whereupon the ship's cook said, sadly: "I have heard the story, and will finish it for you. It was told in the little wine shop kept by the Irishman, Burke, at the Port of the Two Seas."

"Good," said the orderly. "To tell the truth, I became quite interested in the queen's fate."

"The chief men," began the cook, "after hearing of the great queen's disobedience, went to the ruler and asked, 'Has not the king decreed that every person who smokes opium shall be beheaded?'

"'Even so,' replied the king.

"'Are the royal laws enforced against the poor and the weak alone?' they demanded.

"'They are to be executed against all alike, with favor to none,' answered the monarch.

"'Then why is it,' asked the chief men triumphantly, 'that the great queen is permitted to smoke and go unpunished?'

"When the king heard this he was speechless with fear. He dismissed the chief men with a wave of his hand, sent for his beautiful wife and asked if it was true what the people said about her. She kissed his foot in token of submission to his will and said that she could not deny it.

"Of course, the king was anxious to save his favorite queen, because he loved her and because he knew that her death would

cause strife with the neighboring chieftain whose daughter she was. But, being a just king, he could not set aside his law, even to spare the queen and save his country from war.

"Hoping to find a way out of the difficulty he called together his five councillors and asked them if it were possible to save the queen. He was willing to make any sacrifice if only she might live. The councillors considered the matter gravely for a whole day and then decided that the law could not be revoked even to save the chief queen.

"But the king was a man of great resource. He called the two priests of the palace temple and asked them to extricate him from his position. It happened that one of the priests hated the great queen because she had such power over the monarch and he longed to see her removed even by death. The other loved the king and resolved that his favorite wife should not be executed.

"The priests arbitrated disputes and foretold future events by examining the entrails of a freshly slain bullock. So each killed a young bull in the light of the new moon and studied the entrails till the sun rose. The one who hated the queen reported that the signs read in the entrails pointed to her death. But the priest who loved the king said that the omens were favorable to the queen."

Unnoticed by the orderly, who was deeply interested in the story, the cook's voice had grown weaker and weaker till it finally died away in a groan. His arms fell to his knees, his pipe dropped from his lips, and the blue pallor crept over his face. The attendant sprang to his side and administered his most powerful medicines. But the cook never spoke again. In a few moments he ceased breathing, his features relaxed from their horrible grimace, and he was still.

The orderly immediately telephoned his death to the town and then took the yogi outside to scoop out the second grave. When the cook was buried beside the fourth mate under the palms the orderly and the remaining sailor returned to the shack and sat solemnly through the night.

After they had breakfasted and drank a little wine to cheer them, the orderly said, "I'm sorry the cook didn't finish his story. Now I shall never know the end, and I am much interested in the fate of the queen."

The yogi looked up and answered quietly, "I, too, have heard the story and will finish it for you. The first mate told it to the captain one night while we lay at anchor in Delagoa Bay."

"Good," said the orderly relieved. Then a great doubt suddenly filled his mind. "But you may die like the others before you reach the end, so make the story short."

"I promise to finish it," said the yogi seriously.

"Very well, then. Go ahead."

So the wise man began: "The king was now in a worse quandary than ever. Never before had the priests differed in their readings of the entrails. If he accepted the favorable omen, and disregarded the other, the people would say that he had spared the queen because he loved her. Yet he could not bring himself to order the execution. Being a very determined man, however, he would not yield while one hope remained.

"On the Mount of the Moon, the highest peak in Ecbahambra, lives a hermit, a very holy man, who worships the Queen of Night. He eats no flesh and spends the hours between sunset and sunrise in prayer. In former years his word was greater than the king's, and even now it is held in reverence. The king, in his extremity, thought of the hermit and resolved to seek his help.

"The whole court made a three-days' journey to the summit of the mountain and the monarch begged the holy man to intervene in behalf of the beautiful queen. The hermit listened to the king's trouble, thought on the matter for two nights, and finally said, 'On the day following the full of the moon go to the temple gardens and watch the sacred white elephant. If he sneezes three time between sunrise and sunset, the great queen may live.'

"The sacred white elephant," explained the yogi, "is worshipped by the people of Ecbahambra as if he were a god. He is kept in the temple garden day and night, chained to a huge pillar of stone. Once a month, when the moon is full, he decides great questions of state by the drooping of an eyelid or the swish of his tail.

"The king and his retinue journeyed back to the capital and waited till the time of the full moon. On the following day a

great crowd of people had gathered in the gardens to witness the final test of the king.

"About an hour after the sun appeared the elephant rose from his knees, lifted his trunk high in the air, and sneezed so loudly that the children cried out in fear. The king, who was watching from a pavilion, was delighted, and sent word immediately to his favorite spouse that she was one-third saved.

"Then the people waited in silence. Noon passed and the white elephant had not sneezed again. The king, greatly worried, hastened to the palace to consult the chief queen. Now the queen was a person of even greater resource than her husband. When she heard that the sacred elephant had sneezed only once, and saw that the day was half spent, she said, 'Prepare some new hay from the sweet grass which grows in the river bottoms, sprinkle it full of snuff, and give it to the elephant.'

"So the king ordered his servants to cut a bundle of the sweet-smelling grass and they hastened to obey him. While it was still wet he sprinkled snuff on it unseen by the court officials, and offered it to the elephant. The great beast had scarcely begun to eat it when he suddenly lifted his trunk and before he could rise to his feet sneezed so terribly that his breath fell on the people like rain. The king laughed loudly and sent word to his waiting wife that she was two-thirds saved.

"But after that the elephant refused to eat the hay.

"They watched all that afternoon. Once the elephant rose from his knees, stretched out his trunk as if to sneeze, and sank down again without making a sound. Twice he did this and the king was very angry. He would have ordered his soldiers to spear the beast, but he feared the people.

"At last the sun rested on the top of a low hill in the west and began to disappear. Only a few moments of the day remained. The elephant had sneezed twice and the king was beside himself with rage. He walked up and down before the elephant muttering savage threats —"

The orderly, who was now wholly engrossed in the story and watched every word as it came from the yogi's lips, saw the old man's mouth contorted in a hideous grin. An instant later the

fatal blue pallor suffused his face and his whole body began to tremble. The attendant sprang up and treated him as he had treated the fourth mate and the ship's cook. While he forced stimulants between the rigid jaws he shrieked to the dying man, "Wait a minute, wait. You can't die till you finish the story. Remember your promise. Did the elephant sneeze again?" But his frantic appeals fell on unheeding ears. The last sailor was dead and the story was still unfinished.

The yogi buried, the orderly was compelled to remain in the pest house until the period of incubation for the disease had passed. As no symptoms of the plague developed, he was soon back at his work in the hospital. But he was greatly changed. Living alone in the shack that had witnessed the death of the three sailors he had brooded over the story left uncompleted by the fourth mate, the ship's cook and the yogi, and agonized over the fate of the great queen till his mind had become morbidly affected. His friends could not diagnose his malady, but thought that he was suffering from melancholia brought on by his horrible death watch.

During his absence from the hospital a new nurse had been received. It was her custom once a week to give amateur demonstrations in spiritualism for the entertainment of the other nurses and the internes. One evening the orderly attended a seance out of curiosity. The nurse placed his hands on a slate and told him to think of a question. But the poor fellow, his thoughts ever brooding on the fate of the African queen, disregarded her instructions. After a while the nurse lifted his hands, turned over the slate, and said playfully, "Let's see what's written." This is what they read:

"The sun had sunk so low behind the hill that the eye could gaze on it without watering, when the elephant rose from his knees, stretched out his trunk to its full length, and sneezed for the third time."

The yogi had kept his promise.

The Game on the Lonesome Road.*

BY JACK BROWNING.

THE ponies were comparatively fresh, considering the miles they had covered, for the girl, careful to preserve their strength for the still harder ride ahead, had changed from one to the other at frequent intervals. But the girl herself, when at last she reached the stream and the lone cottonwood, was fairly dizzy with the heat and dust.

The stream was hardly more than a trickle — indeed, the ponies drank the water almost as fast as it dripped down from the hillside to the road — and the cottonwood, near the end of its long struggle against drouth and wind, had scarcely foliage enough to cast a shadow — but they were the first suggestion of water and shade that the girl had seen since early morning, and the sun was now at its highest and hottest.

"That's enough, boys," she said. "You can have another taste before we start."

The ponies, reluctant but obedient, put their noses together in a clump of parched grass, and the girl sank down with her back to the tree and rolled a cigarette. After a puff or two she removed her leggins and shoes and stockings, and splashed her feet like a child in the shallow water.

"Oh, but I'm tired! Heigh-ho!"

But even as she sighed a smile flickered through the weariness of her face, and she prepared to remount. Ahead was the long, lonesome road, with its dust and heat; here were water and shade and a place to rest; but ahead, also, was a man. Her past was threaded with many blistered roads such as this, and with other roads that were snow-covered and wind-swept; but each was a memory to smile at now, for each had led her to the man, or had

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led the man to her. Soon this road, too, would be a memory to smile at. With a defiant little laugh she faced the dust again, and coaxed the ponies to a gentle canter. She rode astride, and her slender young body fell into the swing with the easy, loose-armed erectness of a cowboy.

There was not a sign of human life in any direction. Miles back, hours ago, she had passed a freight wagon bound for Vickers, but the driver had roused himself only long enough to nod, and to uncoil his popping whip down the long length of his mule team, and then had relapsed into his heat-induced lethargy. Not even his dust was in sight now. Far behind, through the flickering heat-waves, the dim blue outline of the mountain she had descended in the cool morning wavered indistinctly. It seemed years behind her now — like the inhabited world; and she sighed at the recollection of the cool mountain trail and the dew-wet leaves that had brushed her face. But ahead, and looming hopefully nearer now, was the range the man was to cross to meet her. He would be well down through the foothills by this time, and where the road branched off toward Vickers they would meet, unless ——

Sometimes, in such weary hours as these, she was compelled to admit that luck had been overkind to her and the man. But — and optimism was never a full moment behind the intruding fear — luck would surely outlast her youth, and after that — well!

Again her defiant little laugh broke the stillness. Already she could see the green of the timber-covered slopes, and in two hours — perhaps sooner — she would be with the man.

During her abstraction she had drooped like a flower in the heat, and the ponies had slipped into a shambling walk; but, suddenly thrilled by the thought that the man might even then be waiting at the rendezvous, she sat erect and eager, and called the ponies to quick attention. For some time she rode briskly; and she forgot her weariness as the range, for so long only a smooth mass, broke up gradually into cañons and ravines and crags, and its trembling, indistinct blue changed into stable and distinct shades of brown and gray and green. But the air of the western highlands, so dry and clear except in times of storm,

gives to far-distant objects so convincing an appearance of nearness that even practised eyes are often deceived; and the girl grew weary again long before she reached the foothills.

But finally she gained the forks of the road and the shade. She slipped to the ground with a sigh of relief, and gave the ponies their heads in the grass. Then she whistled — the clear, sweet call of the phoebe bird. The two plaintive notes seemed to hover an instant in the hot air, then float away to the coolness of the deeper wood. A moment the girl listened expectantly, but there was no answer, and she sighed. Hopefully, however, she repeated the call; and this time, from deep in the wood, there came a faint response. Trembling with excited eagerness, she whistled again; and again, nearer now, came the answer.

"He is here!" she whispered.

Time and again she called, and each time the answer echoed nearer. But suddenly her heart sank. The answer had come from almost directly above her, and, looking up into the tree, she saw a phoebe bird fluttering expectantly from branch to branch.

In spite of her disappointment she smiled. "Poor little bird! I suppose you are disappointed, too. But never fear, our mates will come!"

She whistled again, and the tiny gray bird fluttered almost within reach of her hand. But she was too tired to play.

"Good-by, little lover!" she said. And then, choosing the thickest shade, she threw off her broad felt hat and dropped at full length, limply, to the grass. But even stronger than her weariness was her impatience, and after a few moments she sat up and drew from her belt a small, roughly-sketched map, which she examined attentively, reading the penciled directions at the bottom.

"Hide in the thick timber between the forks of the road," the directions ran, "till I come. I should make it by two o'clock — three, at the latest; but you may wait till four. If I am not there by four, don't attempt to investigate, but take the back trail — and hurry. Ride the fresher horse, and leave the other, saddled and bridled, tied in the brush. Remember, don't try to investigate!"

"The coward!" she said, slipping the map back under her

belt. But there was only tenderness in her voice; for she knew that the man's daring weakened only where she was concerned. She looked at her watch. It was three o'clock.

"He will surely be here soon," she thought. "Perhaps——" She looked up through the branches of the tall tree above her. "Perhaps I could see him from there."

Drawing on her gauntlets to protect her hands, she caught a low-hanging branch and scrambled nimbly up, higher and higher, till she swayed precariously on the topmost limb. From her lookout she could take in the ascending road for perhaps half a mile, and beyond, all the way to the top of the hill, short segments of the winding strip reappeared at frequent intervals, but, even with her binocular, she could detect no sign of life.

"I'm going to ride on and meet him," she resolved finally. "He will be worn out after the long ride — and, besides, we can save time that way. But what's that?"

Lying in the road, so near that she had overlooked it, was a small white object — a torn fragment of wrapping paper, or of newspaper, she thought at first.

"But no! It's a — yes, a handkerchief! That's odd! And there, farther up the road, are some more white spots. They look like — I believe they're — yes! they are playing cards! And there are more, still farther up the road!"

Caught by a fear too swift for the guidance of reason, she slipped recklessly to the ground and ran the few yards to the handkerchief.

"His!"

The color left her face, and a hundred fragmentary thoughts flashed so wildly through her mind that she grew dizzy. But, remembering the cards, and intuitively accepting them as a message from the man, she ran like a frightened animal toward them.

Upturned in the road were an ace and jack of spades, and a three of diamonds; face down were two other cards, which she quickly reversed.

"The king and queen of spades — a four flush! That's plain enough — he has lost!"

For a moment she swayed, almost fainting. Prolonged anxiety, and the fatigue of the long, hot road, had left her with scant

strength to bear the shock; but with sheer force of mind she quieted her trembling nerves, and turned her thoughts from despair to a rational consideration of the situation.

"But," she thought hopefully, "he cannot have been captured —his hands would be bound if he were a prisoner."

The hope was a slender one, but her anxiety magnified it almost to certainty. There was still the second card-message a short distance beyond, but, instead of going at once to it, she thought to save time by first running back for the horses. She was resolved to find the man, if she had to follow the road to Vickers; and in a very few minutes she had remounted and lashed the ponies to a swift gallop.

It was a king of diamonds that stopped her; a little farther on she picked up a jack of hearts, and beyond, a king of clubs.

"King — jack — king!" she said aloud. "King — jack — king!" In her haste and anxiety to clear the obscure message she fairly pleaded with the cards. "King — jack — king! — Oh!"

Her voice broke, but, clinching her teeth, she forced back the half-escaped sob.

"That means — he is the jack — yes! And between two kings — he is a prisoner!"

This certainty, and the necessity for quick action which it involved, gave her a man's strength. With the keen eye of a mountaineer she scanned the road, reading its signs almost at a glance.

"Probably a buckboard, or a light spring wagon," she thought, examining the one narrow track in the dust. "Nothing else has passed for some time. The wagon must explain how he was able to get at the cards. They are not his cards — they are old and worn — but there may have been a deck in the wagon, and even with his hands tied behind him, he could probably have got at them."

But speculation was of little use. Impatiently she remounted. There was no trace of weariness in her face now; the pretty curve of her lips was straight and tense with determination; and, in spite of the steepness of the road, she urged the ponies with spur and whip.

But abruptly she stopped again; a deuce of spades lay face up in the dust. Pausing only long enough to slip it under her belt with the other cards, she put foot to stirrup. But, even as she rose from the ground, her keen eyes detected another white spot, a few yards beyond. It had almost escaped her attention because of its smallness, for it was only the torn quarter of a card.

Excitement — desperation — seemed to have given her a sixth sense; almost instantly she grasped the meaning.

"Quarter past two!" she exclaimed. "That means an hour ago. But the road is rough and steep — I can overtake them!"

Again she was off at a gallop. Her eyes eagerly scanned the road, but there was no further message to stop her, and in half an hour she came to the top of the ridge. Stopping her horses just under the comb, she crept cautiously up and peered over. For perhaps a mile the road sloped gently downward to the bottom of a wide, shallow ravine. For most of the distance it was hidden by twists and turns, and by the heavy timber, but it showed itself often enough to convince the girl that nobody was passing along it.

With the utmost care she examined, through her binocular, the visible fragments of road, and the intervening patches of timber, scarcely breathing the while. Suddenly she drew a sharp breath, and strained eagerly forward. She had located them. At the very bottom of the ravine, half hidden under the trees, she spied a wagon — a light spring wagon, it seemed, and ——

"Yes! they've stopped! There must be a spring or a stream down there and they've stopped for lunch."

A whisp of smoke, upcurling near the wagon, verified her guess; and a moment later a man stepped into view. He paused a moment beside the wagon, then stepped back under the trees, out of sight.

Her course was plain enough now. Remounting, she headed into the timber, then, safely hidden, she turned down hill. The underbrush twisted like snakes about the horses' legs; the overhanging branches tore viciously at her jacket and hair; but, foot by foot, yard by yard, she broke a way through. Several times she dismounted and crept out to the road to get her bearings, and finally, convinced that she had come as near as would be safe with the horses, she left them tied and continued afoot.

Soon she came to a small stream, clear as a crystal, cold as ice. It was very simple now; she had only to follow the stream, for doubtless the men were lunching on its bank. But first she bathed her face and hands, smiling even as she did so at the vanity that clung to her in spite of the desperate situation. She must be fresh and — yes, pretty; why not admit it! For was not the man to see her in a very few minutes!

A moment later she disappeared among the trees, careful to avoid the dead twigs on the ground, and gently guiding the live branches about her back into place. Finally she even dropped to her hands and knees, and crept, inch by inch, like some wild thing near its prey.

In a few moments she heard a short laugh; and, a second later, she paused, breathless, at the edge of a thicket. The whole scene was spread out before her, screened only by a thin, gauze-like fringe of foliage.

And she saw the man. He sat on the ground, his back toward her, his hands clasped behind him — a metallic gleam on his wrists told why. There was a huge man fumbling in the wagon, and another man, of medium size, bending over a small fire, but she had eyes only for the man on the ground. Even as she looked, the large man said something — she could not make out the words — and the man on the ground laughed. The girl thrilled. How good to hear his laugh again!

Now she drew from the light holsters at her belt two small automatic pistols, and, with one clasped in each hand, crept forward. Choosing a moment when both men had their backs toward her, she broke through the last fringe of brush.

"Hands up!"

The smaller man turned like a cat; the large man turned almost deliberately; but both men faced the girl with upraised hands.

"Look out for the little man — he's quick as a wink." It was the man on the ground who spoke.

"All right," the girl replied. "Tell them what to do."

The man on the ground laughed. The big man, whose first expression of surprise had turned to an amused grin, laughed also; and even the smaller man smiled.

"In the first place," the man on the ground half-laughed, "be

very careful. She's a first rate shot with those toys — and I hope you'll take my word for it. Now, lower your left hands — unbuckle your belts — and let them slip to the ground. Thanks. Now, Mr. Deputy, lie down — face down." This to the small man. "And you, Mr. Sheriff, remove this jewelry with which you have bedecked me."

In a moment the man was free.

"Now," he said, smiling in a puzzled way at the captives, "I don't know what to do with you. You've treated me well, and I'd like to return the compliment — but how?"

He looked with such good-natured bewilderment that the sheriff laughed. "Oh, don't put yourself to too much trouble," he said. "And say, there ain't no use lettin' that bacon burn."

The man made haste to lift the pan from the fire.

"Well," he said reluctantly, "there's only one thing to do. Back up to this tree, sheriff, and you, deputy, to that. They're about the right size."

The men obeyed, and in a moment each was secured, his arms handcuffed behind him and around the tree.

"Now," the late prisoner said, "you may sit down or stand up, just as you please. The only trouble is that you are likely to starve before anybody happens along this way."

"No." The girl, who had silently stood guard, now spoke up. "I passed a freighter several miles back. He'll surely be along late to-night or early in the morning. He can hardly camp by that little stream back there — there's not enough water in it for half his mules."

"Good!" the man exclaimed. "The freighter will have an axe, and can chop down the trees. I'd leave the handcuff keys, but there's a bare chance that somebody may happen along. We'll do what we can to make you comfortable."

He carried the two cushions from the wagon, and gave one to each officer for a seat. He also scraped up what hay was in the wagon-box and kicked it out to the horses, which were tied to the rear wheels. In the meantime the girl had poured a cup of coffee, and found sugar and a spoon in the open grub-box.

"How much sugar, sheriff?" she asked.

"'Bout one of your hands full," the good-natured officer replied.

"That equals about two spoonfuls."

The girl held the cup while the sheriff emptied it; after which, rinsing it in the stream and refilling it, she performed a like service for the deputy. Then, assisted by the man, she prepared several bread-and-bacon sandwiches, which she spread on the clean grass near the officers.

"Rather awkward position," she said regretfully, "but I guess you can nibble them by bending over."

"Never did bother much about table manners," the sheriff laughed. "But we won't give the exhibition till you're gone."

The man, while the girl had been serving the officers, had made two small packages of sandwiches, which he slipped into his coat pockets. Then he beckoned to the girl.

"Let's have a cup of coffee now, and then be off."

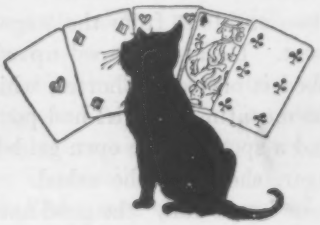
He poured the coffee, and the girl sat down beside him on the grass. The officers looked at them curiously, but said nothing till they had finished, and were rising. Then the sheriff spoke.

"So long," he said. "Don't suppose we'll meet again soon, because a hour's start in these mountains is good as a pardon. But you better change your stamping ground. So long."

"So long," the man replied.

"Good-by," the girl said.

The man paused beside the wagon long enough to get a small canvas bag, which he slung over his shoulder, and then, the girl at his side, stepped off up the road.

"Au' say! young feller," the sheriff called, "I think you're in mighty poor business, but say! the girl's eighteen carat, all right — an' set with di'monds!"

Unmistakably in earnest, the young man turned. "Say, sheriff," he replied, "we're pards on that opinion!"